“That unhappy War of yours”:
Eight Letters from Samuel Laurence to Old Friends in New York City, 1861–1875

DAVID SOUTHERN

Samuel Laurence (circa 1850)
Photograph by Anthony Coningham Sterling
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SAMUEL LAURENCE (1812–84), a portrait artist who specialized in literary figures both British and American, was possibly born in Guildford, Surrey, beyond which, at least until recently, nothing was known of his parentage, his education, or any signal events from his formative years, except that at some point he changed the spelling of his last name from Lawrence.
He first exhibited his work in London in 1834 and moved easily in circles of London literati. On 10 August 1836, at All Soul’s Church, Marylebone, he married Anastasia Gliddon, cousin and adopted sister of Katherine Gliddon and sister-in-law of Thornton Leigh Hunt. Perhaps as early as 1840 and certainly by 1844, the Laurences were participants in a “Bohemian Phalanstery” modeled upon the utopian philosophy of Charles Fourier (1772–1837), and it included Thornton and Katherine Hunt, George Henry Lewes, and Mary Ann Evans.¹ James Spedding likely introduced Laurence to the Carlyles (see CL 29: 355), and at least ten letters to him from Thomas Carlyle (TC) and one from Jane Welsh Carlyle (JWC) can be found in the New York Public Library (Ray collection), the National Library of Scotland (NLS), the University of California Library, Santa Cruz (Strouse collection), and the Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections at Duke University’s Perkins Library.

To a letter from TC to his sister Jean Aitken, 6 July 1838, JWC added this piquant postscript: “—only think Carlyle is to have his picture taken again this time by an artist of genius—if it succeeds I mean to buy it of the man[.] It was I formerly that used to be asked to sit for pictures but every dog has its day” (CLO). Apparently each “dog” did have its “day”: Laurence’s crayon and chalk on paper portraits of TC and JWC, circa 1838, appear as frontispieces in The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle (volumes 8 and 9, respectively). These images, and the oil portrait of JWC that is reproduced on the front cover of this journal, were likely first purchased from Laurence by John Sterling (see CL 15: 163n). The paired crayon and chalk portraits were later presented to Carlyle’s House, Chelsea, by “Miss F. Sterling” (National Trust 60); Laurence’s ætherial likeness of JWC in oil on canvas was given to the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) in 1898 by Major-General John Barton Sterling, John Sterling’s son.

It is probable that the oil portrait was painted in 1849, as JWC’s letter to Laurence tentatively dated 9 May seems to suggest:

On Sunday indeed I did call at your door, in the wild hope that you might perhaps be irreligious enough to paint on Sunday as on other days—but you were not there, whatever you might be doing— I must see C’s
sketch again, before I can tell about the size—and will come—that is—go, as soon as possible—As for doing me; do you really take me for good simpleton enough to believe that my face, at this stage of the world, is one that any Artist out of Bedlam would dream of drawing, for the mere pleasure of “trying his hand on it”—? Not possible—You might like it perhaps for a personification-picture of _Headach and Blue devils_—why not? our exhibition has generally several such pictures—“Suspense”—“Indecision”—“Expectation”—_These_ I have seen with my own eyes and wondered at! Oh yes—and I remember too a “Regret” (!!) which consisted chiefly of a _black gown_—Well—for something of that sort I may be useful to you—and I am very much at your service, so soon as the weather is settled and my headach settled along with it—But understand I am no fool, and go with open eyes to the fact that there must be some “DO” at the bottom of any ones _fancy_ for making a likeness of me. (CLO)

JWC specifically wrote “to paint” and not “to draw,” and because the former medium was less quick and portable and involved more equipment, she sat for Laurence at his studio, where there were easels, a stock of paints and brushes, backdrops, and good light. He did not bring his sketch paper and crayons to Cheyne Row. Almost certainly, her letter refers to the portrait that serves as the cover of this journal.

In addition to the Carlyles, the Sterlings, and James Spedding, Laurence “took” portraits of other members of the circle, including Henry Brooks Adams, Lord and Lady Ashburton, Charles Babbage, George Bancroft, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, the Reverend William Henry Brookfield and Jane Octavia Brookfield, the Reverend J. Kenworthy Browne (Edward FitzGerald’s great friend), Robert Browning, Charles Butler, Sara Coleridge, Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens (at least twice), George Eliot, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Anthony Froude, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Grote, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Leigh Hunt, Thornton Hunt, James Kenney, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Frederick Denison Maurice, George Meredith, Francis Palgrave, John Ruskin, Adam Sedgwick, Alfred Tennyson (at least twice), William Makepeace Thackeray (at least twice), William Hepworth Thompson, Richard Chenevix Trench, and Anthony Trollope. It was Laurence’s ambition to
paint portraits of all of the living “Cambridge Apostles” (see *CL* 10: 115n). Thackeray, a splendidly talented caricaturist in his own right, declared in 1853: “I think Lawrence is the best drawer of heads since Van Dyke” (Ray 3: 317).

Readers who have followed recent volumes of the *Collected Letters* and recent numbers of *Carlyle Studies Annual* will be familiar with the American lawyer, entrepreneur, broker, and philanthropist Charles Butler (1802–97), who rescued TC’s 1838 investment in Illinois bonds. Fifteen years later, TC had forgotten about the investment—“I never bother myself about money at all; having other far deeper bothers which quite abolish that”—but Butler interceded and parlayed the proceeds with
some of TC’s royalties into American railroad stock from which TC could be assured dependable dividends. Seventeen letters from TC to Butler have come to light so far, and the Butler side of the correspondence, so far found only in published sources, may yet emerge in manuscript from the archives of New York University, formerly held at Gould Library and now presumably held at Bobst Library.

Charles Butler was an original thinker who listened carefully and wisely to the bright people who surrounded him. Quick to identify a financial opportunity, he had invested in real estate that developed handsomely in the new cities of Chicago and Toledo, and in turn he reinvested his profits in railroads such as the Chicago, St. Paul, & Fond du Lac; the Chicago & Rock Island; and the Michigan Southern, lines that emanated from and eventually connected these cities. His succession of Manhattan homes served as hubs of intelligentsia both before and after the Civil War, and his circle of friends overlapped the celebrated salons of poet Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta (1815–91), whose extended society included writers, abolitionists, scientists, politicians, inventors, clergy, and experimenters in such Fourieran social utopias as Brook Farm and the Raritan Bay Colony. Among the Butlers’ occasional American guests were Delia Salter Bacon, Henry Ward Beecher, William Cullen Bryant, the Emersons, Margaret Fuller, the Hawthornes, the Peabodys, Marcus and Rebecca Spring, and Samuel J. Tilden; English guests included Matthew Arnold, Froude, Goldwin Smith, and Lyulph Stanley. The Butler archive at the Edinburgh University Library (EUL) is a surprisingly rich resource. It contains three packets of letters and perhaps more, apparently bought in a single purchase in 1987 from a New York autograph dealer. Not only did EUL acquire 16 letters to Butler from TC, in this same lot were 39 letters to Butler from Froude and 12 letters to Butler from TC’s brother John A. Carlyle.

Hoping to export his popularity among British intellectuals to an American audience, Samuel Laurence sailed for New York late in 1853. Upon his arrival, he quickly became part of the Butlers’ household. TC wrote to introduce him to Charles Butler in a letter of 17 January 1854: “The painter whom my wife spoke of has at length, I believe, actually got to sea, and will probably be in New York the week before this arrives: he
has a note to Miss Lynch and you from my wife; and as he is both a really superior artist, and a very honest, modest, kindly and interesting man, we doubt not you will be good to him as opportunity offers” (CLO). TC had assigned Laurence the task of delivering to Edward Everett an old tithe book from Ecton parish, which was connected to the English ancestors of Benjamin Franklin. Delivery of the tithe book occurred finally the following December, and it is a treasure still held by the Massachusetts Historical Society. According to the entry for Laurence in the ODNB, he returned to England in 1861.

Editors’ Note

The following Samuel Laurence letters, with one exception, are from a group of seven purchased from London autograph dealer Julian Browning. They are now in private hands. The letters have been transcribed according to conventional textual guidelines developed for collections of letters. Laurence’s punctuation cannot be described as accurate or consistent, but the editors have made intrusions on his prose only in instances where necessary to preserve the logic of passages. All editorial insertions are contained in square brackets []. The editors have maintained Laurence’s use of double strike-through to indicate excision. The rare occasions where Laurence’s writing is illegible are marked as [---], where the number of obscure characters are denoted by the number of hyphens. The headnote for each letter contains information that is intended to provide the reader with a bare narrative thread that encourages the further study of Laurence and his circle.

Samuel Laurence to Charles Butler, 13 July 1861

Having just returned to England, Laurence was concerned for the welfare of his family, who had remained to sell or to lease their house on 13th Street. “Mr. Bacon” may have been a relative of Delia Salter Bacon; “Mr. Blodgett” was almost certainly fellow-artist William Tilden Blodgett (1823–75) who later co-founded the Metropolitan Museum of
Art. Vincenzo Botta (1818–94) was professor of Italian and Philosophy at New York University and the husband of salon host Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta, the “Miss Lynch” of TC’s January 1854 letter to Butler. “The Farm,” of which Laurence had received such good reports from his daughter Kate, refers to Evergreen Farm, the Butler’s 200-acre country home in present-day Scarsdale, in Westchester County, New York (Stoddard 301–02). The Clarendon Hotel, favored by many visiting Britons, was on the corner of Fourth Avenue (now Park Avenue South) and Eighteenth Street, just above Union Square (Edwards 282).

6 Wells Street, Oxford Street W
July 13, 1861

My dear Mr Butler

I am much obliged to you for your letter of June 25. Without it and my usual weekly one from Mrs Laurence or Kate I should have been uneasy. So that in the multiplicity of your affairs I take it very kindly of you to call in 13th St and write in lieu of Kate, who was disabled (as I conjectured) [by] this disappointment at Mr Bacon’s backing out of his agreement to take our house. Notwithstanding this mishap which does not surprize me, I do hope Mrs Laurence may be able to leave on one of the days you name, the sooner the better as this unhappy state of things prevents any likelihood of better prospects for her, and the sooner she can cut loose from increasing expenses the less embarrassing our future means of meeting those already incurred will be. Kate’s letter of the 29th received —yesterday does not convey anything definite[.] “Mr Blodgett thinks we need not stay till the house is let and we may possibly leave by The Etna.” I can only wait further news & echo their hope of sailing to day. How little when I married, did I think fortune would so spite me as to give me a loving wife and Children and yet debar me the pleasure of their society. How much is due to my own incapacity for managing, I do not know, perhaps all. Life, is an art after all, but one, now that I am aware of the fact, that I cannot learn, and painting, a vocation that will not yeild [sic] a fortune to any sort of but the most excellent workman, or the pretender to excellence, who by some skill and great self assertion contrive to do it, making money it may be, but debasing art and morals alike and ending by selling their
consciences to the devil. Art in England is terribly factitious and I should say on the whole has retrograded the last 10 years, though newspaper critics write at times as if the world had never seen excellence in it, till now. Such, know not what they say, still they warp public judgment for a time, and make the return to sound conclusions lengthy, but they do come right in time, but always through guidance of those few, who can & will take the trouble of investigating the matter with care and judgment and so assure the instinctive emotions of the mass. Such men, will arise out of their apathy in the States, and be saviours to their Country in this time of her need, for the last accounts are rather worse again it seems to me, making it seem dubious whether your Government is a Government equal to the very great occasion that has brought it into existence, the men composing it I mean. It is full early in their term however to judge them, also the merits of Republican governing are come to the extremest test, and to the World at large, must be watched with the greatest interest. I for one, believe that Monarchy in England is governed by popular opinion, but public opinion is slow and safer it wd seem than the signal young blooded Master of the States, who really thinks that will is, the thing, “I may do as I’ve a mind to” was a phrase I often heard in New York, and as often as I heard it, did I think how entirely incompatible it was with the general good will of all. When people can recognize the moralities of the great Teachers teaching, do unto others as you would they should do unto you, & the like—then, and only then will they be able to govern well, whether under a single ruler or many. The great difficulty with you is, in having so many more adventurers in Politics, only intent on self, these are the real rebels and hindrances. North and South alike are afflicted with them, and how are they to be got rid of. Also North and South so really differ, all ways, it seems to me, and I cannot conceive such genuine differences can ever be reconciled, and become what they are not. Were I a Northern Man I think I should say, let them, the South, secede and welcome, but I would at the same time insist, that those of them who held public office and did commit the treason of betraying their trust, should have the reward of their treason, and expiate with their lives the great evils they have brought on the country. A Country of such plenteous wealth, and generous aspirations, freedom for
all, alas, license, has been a synonym for Freedom, and how in this present Chaos to make the true meaning of the word clear to all, is the problem for your Government to solve, and shew that Law & Order are Freedom, and naught else, which must and shall be attained, and maintained, even though bloodshed be the means, let us hope, it may be without.

Kate says The Farm looks very beautiful[.] I am glad to think of you all there in quiet, and the great pleasures I have shared in these, may you all enjoy it long, and I once more visit and partake of those enjoyments one of these days, till when I must live on the memory of them, and your great kindness to me and mine wh I often review from the day you first saw me, shaving, do you remember at the Clarendon? and took me first to your bachelor then your family hospitality, wherein I shared your joys and sorrows, each dwelling with me as livelily [sic], as this t’were yesterday.

I have no Railway Committee in this room of mine, only myself, but I have let writing alone till the latest, and do it in a hurry. I did once more intend to enclose one for Emma, have intended a hundred times to do it. I can hear her say, why don’t he then? My best love to her for all that, Mrs Butler and Anna. I fancied I should see Mr Botta this Spring, Is he in N. York still. [O]f Mrs Botta & her mother I do hear about now & then. If my family do leave I shall hear less, unless indeed Emmie will condescend to mould me into a correspondent. I have little hope of your keeping me posted up, you have so much else to do, but I know you quite intend it, Should Mrs L. not have left, will you kindly say[?] I do not write this week, in the hope they may have sailed [and] shall be governed by what they write me.

With loving regards to mutual friends I am

Affectionately yours     Samuel Laurence.

Samuel Laurence to Mrs. Botta, 9 October 1865

This letter from Laurence to Anne Charlotte Lynch Botta (MS: MsL / L379b, University of Iowa) was written at two sittings with an unspecified lacuna between them. The mention of “Your unhappy war” and Vincenzo Botta’s Discourse on the Life, Character, and Policy of
Count Cavour (1862) suggest that the letter was begun in 1862 or soon afterward. Botta's Discourse was published by G. P. Putnam of New York, and no English edition of later date has been located. In 1862, The Spectator was edited by Meredith Townsend and Richard Holt Hutton; Thornton Hunt was editor of The Daily Telegraph from 1855 until his death in 1873. At the spot where the date is inserted, the pen and the penmanship are markedly different from that of the first part of the letter. For “Mrs. Ellett,” who is unidentified, there is a possibility that Laurence meant Elliott, Eliott, or some other variant, but Ellett is what he appears to have written. Charles W. Hackley, a West Point graduate of the Class of 1829, one that included future Confederate generals Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston (Collum 422), was professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Columbia College until his death in 1861. A Southern sympathizer, according to Horace Greeley, Hackley had corresponded with Jefferson Davis (Greeley 512). For N. P. (Nathaniel Parker) Willis (1806–67), whose portrait by Laurence now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery, Washington; see The Forrest Divorce Case (New York: 1852). Staten Island-born Jasper Francis Cropsey (1823–1900) was a widely known and highly esteemed landscape painter; a brilliant colorist of the Hudson River School, he lived and exhibited in England, 1856–63.

[ circa 1862]

My dear Mrs Botta

I have never replied to Mr Butler’s letter that heralded your Husbands book on Cavour, and have since then received your note to introduce Mrs Ellett whom I have not-yet seen, she sending a note through a friend, who tells me Mrs E. has gone to the Country. If on her return I can be of any use, of course I shall be, if only for your sake, who spared no pains to do friendly offices for me during the years I lived in N.Y. all which I often think about, but as you very truly suppose, I may have forgotten because I do not prove by writing words of thankful remembrance to friends that are very dear to me. I have written to very few since leaving America, for no reason that would be sufficient to give[,] the one common to most people of letting opportunities go by waiting more convenient ones etc. etc. as you know yourself, I daresay. In the matter of the Book I can and will give the reason, which you can give to our friend
Charles Butler. It was a full week before I got it, after receiving the order on the Publisher who lives full three miles out of my beat, another week before I read it, though it is very interesting and makes one read it thro’ at once. I should fancy a most just appreciation of the character of a Man, the world acknowledges great and excellent, interesting from its explanation of the growth of his mind, and exceedingly well done on Botta’s part; little cause for wonder that he was desired to print it: I do not now know anyone writing upon the Spectator, so took it to Thornton Hunt who still has it. [A] few weeks back I asked whether he had been able to read it, but he had not: “The time has passed for noticing it in full, but occasion may arise; at all events I can mention it, and will as soon as I can, but I assure you that I have waiting there 5 weeks past, Articles I have much at heart that are shelved as yet by reason of current matters which must be first put in.” [T]o my question shall I ask elsewhere, he said no “I’ll use it as soon as I can.” At the time there was so much interest in Cavour’s life that all our Paper’s and Review’s had their say, but as the interest attaching to such a Character cannot cease, fresh notices of it will naturally occur. So all that I can do further, will be to jog Hunt’s memory on the subject, wh it may perhaps need, through the excess of work he always has on hand. That unhappy War of yours keeps the press almost in subject matter not often fairly or even judiciously handled as regards Northern views. Newspaper printers as a rule in all countries are not people of nice judgment, but partisans in fact, living by representing opposite views of the same thing, making news in fact, inventing reasons for the actions of their opponents, as well as actions too. This amongst other causes is the reason why History cannot be written truly by contemporaries, who must be led by feeling, into the same dilemma of partisanship, however soon, or late this War may end, its History will afford another to the many lessons the world has already to the feebleness of the sense of right, as taught by the Teachers we boast of following, but whom the World has clearly not yet begun “to understand, only to wrongly dogmatize about.” I will not discuss your War because your Government will not allow free discussion of views that are not its own, but I hope it may be able to carry the country creditably through the very great calamity that has befallen it.
What has become of your nephew Tom? I can recall the many small troubles which your Mother used to relate to me in 9th St about him, his impatience at School and general adverse views to those of so quiet and orderly a Grandmother as she is. That little tea room with the little domestic discussions that we used to have about curtains (that great dark one), carpets, etc, about “Anne” coming out so strong in the Ebony & blue chairs, “my breath, and the inhaling p[--]en for it,” the cozy little dinners you used to give there where I made acquaintance with many friends some already gone never to return, not the least of them Prof’r Hackley, a true amiable gentleman, who for his own merit’s sake and kind interest in me often recurs to memory. I should like to know about his widow & Son, my regards to them, and please especially to N. P. Willis and his. of them, I have not chanced to hear incidentally even. Cropsey I see at long intervals and hear from them a little news of some mutual friends. October 9th 1865 Dear Mrs Botta It seems absurd to send an Old letter across the Atlantic. It will at all events show that the attempt was made to do it a long time back, & because my letter to our kind friend Charles Butler is light of weight I enclose this in the same cover. I do not know whether your Husband is back, but think he said “I shall not see you again before I sail” I shall be so glad to hear from you any news of your own home, as well as any of our many mutual friends. I have no especial good to report of myself or my belongings. Mrs L is almost always indisposed in some degree and I get more applause than money. I have been much pleased this summer to see several friends from N York. I wish I could take a look at all the others there whom I have not seen. best regards to your husband

believe me always / yours very truly

Samuel Laurence

Samuel Laurence to Charles Butler, 10 November 1868

A brief notice of the death of Samuel Laurence (1884), clipped from a newspaper—probably American—has been affixed to the first page
of this letter: “Samuel Lawrence English portrait painter, died last month at the age of seventy-three. He first exhibited in London at the Society of British Artists in 1834. He painted, among a number of distinguished men, Carlyle, Babbage, Grote, Lord Ashburton, Leigh Hunt, Thackeray, for the Reform Club, and Browning.” Laurence’s portrait of Cyrus Field (1819–92), the American entrepreneur who laid the first transatlantic cable, may be one of the two “unknown” figures among the Laurence portraits at NPG. The Peninsular and Oriental Company, employer of Laurence’s son Godfrey, has been a subsidiary of Dubai Ports World since 2006.

6 Wells St: Oxford St. W
Nov 10 1868

Dear Mr Butler

I have never answered your kind & welcome letter of July 15, brought by the Botta’s. Their advent was indeed a pleasant reminder of many many things of the past, but not the forgotten, most heartily do I wish that I could have seen you too. I thank you for your Photo, but it wont change its expression when spoken to, but though I can get no change out of it except through my fancy, I must fancy I hear the voice as I did in old times under your roof, mostly happy times too. To day I dine with our friends who leave this tomorrow for Lpool and you will have the pleasure of seeing them both in good case, now at least if the weather keeps moderate they will not change their looks for the worse. But for sundry anxieties here I should wish to go along with them, and see other friends I love beside yourself. It was a great pleasure to see Longfellow. He was much sought and I could only see him at this breakfast table, “come to breakfast, yr only chance” So I went thrice, and was glad he is so well. Cyrus Field too. I drew him, as I hope you will have seen ere this. He got through that hard and great work of his for wh he deserves all praise. I have not anything fortunate to tell you of me & mine. On the whole Mrs Laurence is in better health, and the rest fairly well, on the whole. Our Eldest son in Shanghai, not very thriving. “Things have been very bad out there” Godfrey is in the The Penr & Orient/ Compy[..] I was sorry Thorpe made up his mind to return for my part, but I think his Mothers malady, seen to be fatal[..] drew him over.
He talks of the great kindness he received all the time and contrasts the freer mode of doing business there, over the cut & dried way of home. He is however likely to do very well, and in the Silk trade, wh he understands, has a salary to begin with of £400.— I have signed the Deed of the Land, and the Botta’s will tell you when they deliver it, and it is very kind of you, like you in short[,] to take the trouble you propose, to help me. If it does sell well, the money would be very useful to my very mean purse. Though it ought to go into your own, by good rights[.] May prosperity attend you always & health of each one dear to you. I am vexed with myself for not writing more fully but have left it to the last moment, with loving regards to Mrs Butler Emma & Anna I am ever yours Affectionately

Samuel Laurence

Charles Butler Esquire—

Samuel Laurence to Charles Butler, 21 September 1869

Wenlock Abbey was the Shropshire seat of James Milnes-Gaskell (1810–73), politician and distant cousin of Richard Monckton-Milnes. The Butlers had moved from 13 East 14th Street to a new house on Park Avenue, that part of Fourth Avenue above Union Square. The Laurences, too, had moved: to Camden Road in North London, but Samuel retained the old Wells Street address for his studio.

351 Camden Road N.
Sept 21 1869

Dear Mr Butler

My tardy acknowledgment of the due receipt of your first bill for £100, has crossed yours of the 6th of this month. The receipt of which to day, compels me to send a postscript as it were, to the very brief note sent from Wenlock Abbey. Its brevity was due to my mistaking the hour, my host reminding me that I must close at once, or lose the Post. This information so “hurried me up” that I hardly know whether I thanked you
for the trouble you had taken in my behalf. I do thank you very much indeed for this addition to many other instances recorded in my memory of your real friendliness to me & mine. I was very loth [sic] to part with the Land, but there was a necessity laid upon me, leaving no choice between foregoing the increase, that might have arisen from your proposed new investment of the proceeds of the sale, and the present use of the money. It has been of great service I am happy to say, and you too, will be glad to hear that it was. You may guess how down I was, from being in the hands of an Oculist some time, & then into those of a Surgeon, with my right hand in splints. Both are well now. I had a fortights holiday, at Mr Milnes Gaskell’s[.] They are Yorkshire people who bought Wenlock Abbey some years ago, chiefly I guess for Parliamentary purposes, Gaskell, Senior, was the representative of the Borough till its recent disfranchise- ment. His Son only lives there during the Summer months, in the Priors House. (The Abbey is but a ruin) in this there are many reminders of monkish life, its rude ample comforts, and self imposed discomforts, the latter doubtless, kept within the bounds of endurance. On the whole, it must have been a useless existence, except to the few who cultivated learning, to those such a secluded life was a sp[!]endid opportunity. They knew how to build enduring habitations, the room I slept in, has walls 4 feet thick of well wrought solid stone, the only cupboards being recesses in the Walls, with oaken doors almost black with age. Some parts of the Abbey are said to be so early as the 6th Century most of it of the 15th. How difficult it is to ascertain the reason why ancient things affect one’s feelings, as they do! All endeavor to realize the fe ways of life of those who lived ages ago, ends in very scant knowledge. The small particulars of daily life, which tell so much when actually seen, are too trivial to be written down, looks & behaviour cannot be described perfectly in words. Pictures only shew how like past men & women are to present one’s. Those Old stones suggest how much there is that we cannot know, hence perhaps the sadness in retrospect, and the pleasure of wonder. But I must leave speculating on our relation to the past. It is the past, and we shall be, in our turn.

I am glad you are able to report as well of the snatches of holiday at the sea side, and their good effect on your health[.]
It sounds quite natural, and recalls my share of such with the Botta’s. I do hope I may yet have another sight of your Country and a few friends faces that I should dearly like to see. I am right glad Emily had a good time, and Anna too. Do not forget your promise of a Photo. of your new house. We have moved our abode you see, (not my Studio) and are better off for the change. When you are fairly settled perhaps “Emmie” will let me have one of her pleasant gossipy letters. She would tell me all about things I want to know. Mrs Laurence is much better in health as she grows older. She joins with the girls in love to Mrs Butler with your Affectionate

Samuel Laurence—

Samuel Laurence to Charles Butler, 9 September 1871

Dr. Vaughan was Charles John Vaughan (1816–97), former head-master of Harrow who had restored the fortunes of that school before his forced resignation in 1869. His brother-in-law Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815–81) was Dean of Westminster. His sister, unnamed in this letter, was Mary Stanley (1813–79), a nurse who trained with Florence Nightingale (1820–1910) and who went with her to the Crimea in 1854. Of Miss Stanley, her brother wrote (1879), “The feeling that her public labours were for the most part unacknowledged—a circumstance due to various causes—cast something of shade over her life” (Stanley 344).

6 Wells St.. Oxford St.. W
September 9 / 1871

My dear Mr Butler

Yours of the 23rd: Augt is to hand, with it’s [sic] enclosed draft for £59.0.8. I wish the promised payment had arrived—Still, I am very glad indeed, that you did not wait longer and thank you very much for sending this.

I am also pleased to hear that my Brother Henry had come to N.Y. It will be a great pleasure to poor Kate to see and talk with him.
It is a relief to me to know that you think she did right to have Mr Bridgman’s employ, and although she had told me Mr Bridgman approved of the step, I could not but fancy she had paid more attention to the remarks of the servants (whatever they were) than the deserved, and that these coupled with her own disquieted mind had blinded her to her own interests; At a distance, it is most, indeed, impossible to judge properly the actions of another. That you and Mrs Butler think the step, a right one, fully contents me that it, is so, and I can only hope that something will ere now have come to her, in the way of genial occupation. She has so many good qualities, that is would indeed be a loss if they do not find a sphere of action.

Just before people left London, I was at a party at Dr Vaughan’s. Miss Stanley was talking to me about a picture of her Brother, and said, “I want him to sit to you[.]” So when people are back in Town, I shall see about it. In this whirl, folks get into sets, and although I know Dean Stanley many years, I seldom meet him. Both his sisters Mrs Vaughan & Miss S. frequently. The “Philosopher of Chelsea” I meet, never, now. Each time I have gone to Chelsea to see him he has been out[.]

His neice [sic] (who does his writing) sent me a note telling the hours I can find him in, but they are not, when I can go, and so it may chance I never see him more! I am glad he keeps up his intercourse with you. His vols: make a formidable number now! What is the Prof Botta doing? I am glad to hear of them. Please me [sic] remember me very kindly to them, and to Old Mrs Lynch too. I shall write less hastily soon and forward the Photo of Dean Stanley when I can find a good one. He, photographs very well. [W]ith loving regards to your home. Believe me——

Ever truly yours
Samuel Laurence

Samuel Laurence to Charles Butler, 2 October 1872

In another hand on the last page of this letter, the following note is inserted: “Saml Laurence / Photograph / of Dean Stanley.” In 1869 Charles J. Vaughan, Stanley’s brother-in-law, had been appointed
Master of the Temple, or senior clergyman of Temple Church, London. William Learned Marcy (1786–1857) was governor of New York (1833–38, followed by William H. Seward), Secretary of War in the Polk administration from 1845 to 1849, and Secretary of State in the Pierce administration (1853–57, succeeding Edward Everett); apparently Laurence drew his portrait.

6 Wells St: Oxford St., W
October 2, 1872

My dear Mr Butler

When once the habit of correspondence is broken, the intervals of writing lengthen, and lengthen.

I had not forgotten the wish expressed in your last letter to me, “that I would get a good Photo of Dean Stanley and forward it”

I at once went to some shops, but was not able then or since to get the one I think the best of him, though I have repeatedly tried; Long ago I asked the Dean’s Sisters, (both old friends) Miss Stanley and Mrs Vaughan (Dr Vaughan Master of Harrow, now Preacher at the Temple) Only the other day I got the enclosed note and Photo. The Photo I prefer, is the same view of his face, but looking straight before him, & standing, but not one of the shops has it. There has been some talk of his sitting to me but no beginning has been made— I hope you will like this copy.

Do you possess still the drawing of Govr Marcy? I should very much like to have a Photo of it, and also of the drawing of Carlyle (have I asked you before?) If you could get them done, with little trouble to yourself, I should very much like to have them!

I hope you, and yours, are well? Mine are. They have had a few weeks Country air walking in Windsor Park. My daughter Mrs Thorpe has surprized us to day, she writes she has accepted and engagement in N.Y. “Particulars when I return tomorrow.” She has been at Lpool with Mrs Booth some weeks past.

I cannot but regret it, as she throws up remarkably good prospects here, both of study and profit, in the future. We shall hear her views tomorrow.

I do not become a Fashionable Painter, and so out on much
in the Old way as to monied success. I have the great pleasure still of doing Intellectual people, but they as a rule are not always of the wealthy class. London will soon be filling now. Is there any chance of your coming over? I should like to see you and yours again (Is Emmie married) and Annie thoroughly well?

my loving regards to each and all from yours ever truly
Samuel Laurence

Samuel Laurence to Charles Butler, 17 March 1875

Twenty-one years earlier, Laurence described his first days at 13 East 14th Street in a letter to Mrs. Butler, who was then traveling in Italy: “I have made several drawings in that front room on the second story which Mr. Butler has been so good as to let me have; but I hope you will not find that it has been converted into a dirty painter’s studio, such as you may have seen during your travels. The possession of this room has been a source of great pleasure, giving me the companionship of one of the most amiable men I have ever met with, doubly valuable to me in this foreign country, though it is odd to call that foreign which has in it so much of my own England. Yet the aspect of the streets in New York is rather French than English, mainly owing to the trees, I think, which the June sun has just now brought suddenly into full leaf. This climate I find, so far, more variable even than our English one; but the one you are now in is the pattern one for splendor” (Stoddard 323).

Professor Marvin R. Vincent D.D. of Union Theological Seminary and Dr. George L. Prentiss were successive ministers at Church of the Covenant where the Butlers were congregants from 1865, having moved their membership from Mercer Street Presbyterian Church. “Mr. Blodgett,” identified earlier as William Tilden Blodgett, is the paterfamilias in Eastman Johnson’s genre painting Christmas Time: The Blodgett Family, 1864, which depicts a well-to-do New York City household gathered in their parlor on Christmas morning (see <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109082?seq-2>). Charles Patrick Daly (1816–99) was Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas of the City and State of New York and a former president of the American Geographical Society. Judge Daly advised President Lincoln in his handling of the
Trent affair (1861), even though John Slidell, one of the captured Confederate emissaries, was a social acquaintance.

Laurence’s portrait of Edward, Prince of Wales, has not been located and may not have been completed. A month after this letter, TC published his final essay, “Portraits of John Knox” (Fraser’s 64 [April 1975]: 407–39). He had asked several artists to examine the Knox portrait to confirm its provenance, perhaps unsuccessfully (see Dunn, “Carlyle’s Last Letters to Froude” 245). Froude was the editor of Fraser’s from 1860 until 1874. Apart from James Spedding, Laurence’s “chiefest friend,” other Lake Country associations include the merchant Joshua Stanger and his wife Mary. Laurence’s letters to the Stangers (1845–74) are among the manuscript holdings of the Wordsworth Trust, Dove Cottage, Grasmere, Cumbria. William Watkiss Lloyd (1813–93) was a classicist and author, and his Christianity in the Cartoons, Referred to Artistic Treatment and Historic Fact (1865) was published in London by Williams & Norgate.

351 Camden Road N
March 17 1875

My dear Mr Butler

It was a great pleasure to receive your letter of date Feby 13th recalling the happy time of your friendly call upon me, and continued duration through all these intervening years of a Friendship that is very dear to me to dwell upon. I now-again tell of the manner in which it came about: how you carried me off to your house, keeping me there, making me one of your family, and on their return, the additional kindliness freely bestowed by each of them on me your guest, never impaired or weakened by the 21 years that have flown away since that Feby 13, 1854!

Only a few days before the receipt of yr letter I had a call from your nephew, at the end of his visit, rather than at his first coming. So the little use I might have been to him (had he needed it) I could not give; during our brief talk I learnt what you tell as to Mrs Butler’s and Annie’s health, indeed, of each one. “I am so little at my Hotel, that it will really be no use your calling, and in three days I sail, longing to see my family again[*].” That is all I saw of him, but hope he arrived safely at home, that sacred place, whatever its shortcomings or drawbacks, that come to many an one spite of the bit and bridle one must in Duty wear, or rather,
in regard to memory of that warmth of affection that made the individual home begin at all—

I hope your Nephew had not been going over too large a space, for the time he had at command—a fault of most Travellers, very naturally desiring to see all, the perhaps One occasion of their lives allows. Still I think, when the means of travel were less, Travellers saw more. The memory, on return being less Overcharged than now that people go the Round of the World, overtaxing mind and body—into forgetfulness of much that was seen[.] . . . We cannot live however but conditionally, must be in accord with the Times. Though I for one, deplore the undue hastiness of present life, and believe it issues in realizing the old saying, “more Haste! worse Speed.” Slow Coach, your Emily would say of me, only it’s Cockney, not a Yankee Expression. I know all that composed your Birthday dinner party, except Dr Vincent. Is he successor to Dr Prentiss your then Pastor, though a sudden thought comes that another name intervenes? between these two! I should like to have been one of the guests, am very glad Mrs & Mr Botta are flourishing. I did not expect she would rounded into Stoutness. Is her voice as soft, cheery, & pleasant as in the days of I won’t say thinness, but her fair condition? That he had grown into this state would not have surprized me, his promise all pointing that way— The rest I remember very well and am glad each one of them is well in health. Mr Blodgett always comes to see me, Chief Justice and Mrs Daly I saw rather much of, these latter came here to dinner, so we could ask after all friends in N. York[.] They enjoyed their Holiday immensely—and were looking remarkably well. We have better accounts from our Daughters in British Columbia. The last letter bears date Jan: 29, Exceedingly cold weather which they could ill bear, but were fairly well in health and there seems more promise there for Daisie in the way of teaching. She had a very hard time of it in N.Y. the latter part especially. Her little Son is well. But even now, I miss his company. He made quite a sunshine in my dull House, where indisposition prevails. Things wear a better aspect and promise for Kate. Her Husband seems very pleased that Daisie has joined her. So we hope the step taken will not be repented of. There was much perplexity and disturbance of mind when Kate left N.Y. So it came I imagine, that the end
her Sister—had not much heart to talk over what was in some
sense vague to themselves—Scant means breed hard thoughts,
and odd behaviour in some, Easily excused, when explained,
though much explanations are seldom made; leaving all, to
Charitable construction. I have found it very hard lines, to
reinstate myself here, where Fashion rules Supreme. Just a year
ago, I began a Portrait of The Prince of Wales, found him a
most unaffected man, have been once since to Marlborough
House— He explained himself pleased with the picture so far
as it has gone—but it is so difficult for him to give the time,
that I doubt its being done for the Exhibition. Had a note from
his Secy a week ago to say he had not forgotten me, & hoped
in a few days to name a day & hour for the next sitting. He is
one of the hardest worked— What The World esteems plea-
sure! when compulsory must be a real hardship. He seems always
on the go— Every one must like him, He is so genuine, and
kindly, seems full of enquiry, talking to the point.

Carlyle I have seen rather much of. He came to Wells Street
not long since very full of interest in a Portrait of John Knox.
I should say it must be the man. C. feels assured it is, & he is
a good Judge of Physiognomies[.] This one is full of careful
weighing—vehemently enthusiastic. We cannot discover who
the Original is by. Curious, that so many details of those who
have moved the World beyond their generation should be so
entirely missing. I believe there is some mention of it in this
month[']s number of Frasers mage which Froude used to Edit.
Did you make the latters acquaintance? I have known him
many years— He being a connexion of the Chiefest Friend
I have, James Spedding, a very Rare character, this latter. I
had a Book given me by its Author, Watkiss Lloyd entitled
“Christianity in the Cartoons,” that everyon[el] should read
for its very complete criticism of Raphael. The Botta’s would
like it, but I must end what will run into Desultory chat, when
I only to [sic] took pen to say how glad I was to get your letter,
and to hear news of you and yours, to each of whom I beg
kindest regards, and am ever yours

Samuel Laurence.
Samuel Laurence to Charles Butler, 21 May 1875

Froude traveled to the Cape Colony in 1874 and 1875 at the behest of Lord Carnarvon, the colonial secretary (Markus 140, 146). Significant sections of his letters to TC from South Africa have been published in Waldo H. Dunn’s two-volume James Anthony Froude: A Biography (London: Oxford UP, 1961). The term “Caffre” (or Kafir), now regarded as an offensive racial slur, was used in the nineteenth century in reference to members of the great Bantu family of southern Africa. Laurence’s oil portrait of TC from that year has not been located and may not have been completed. According to James L. Caw, director of the National Galleries of Scotland, whose supplement “A Commentary on Carlyle’s Portraits, Etc.” was appended to Isaac Watson Dyer’s Bibliography of Thomas Carlyle’s Writings (1928), TC sat for Robert Herdman in Edinburgh in 1874. A footnote to the entry reports that Alexander Carlyle remembered the story differently; he recalls that TC sat for Herdman at Cheyne Row in April 1875 (Dyer 550). It seems unlikely that TC, a most impatient subject, would have posed for two artists in the same season—perhaps Alexander Carlyle was remembering Laurence in that year. Laurence’s wife, the former Anastasia Gliddon, was both cousin and adopted sister of Katherine Hunt, wife of the late Thornton Hunt and mother of the unfortunate Bryan Hunt. The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher was on trial for adultery in January 1875, and the protracted court proceedings ended in a hung jury.

351 Camden Road N.
May 21, 1875.

Dear Mr Butler

Your letter of April 28th ought to have had a more prompt reply than this. I delayed “only for a day or two” but time slips away faster than is counted, and many have fled ere the first intention for delay has got fulfilled. I wanted to call upon Carlyle & knowing you will like to hear of him waited for this, which was accomplished last Monday. (I rarely take a Holiday, though Everybody does at Whitsuntide) It was a warm sunny day I found the ‘Philosopher of Chelsea’ as the Saty Review calls him, in his bit of back garden, pushing an Iron roller along his gravel walk. So you will judge by this exercise how
well he bears his Years. Do you recall his “How are you” and shake of the hand? There we sat for near an hours talk, under the shade of a sort of large flat umbrella stuck into the turf. His talk is as graphic as Ever, so that one sees the things he tells of. Asking after Froude, whose experiences at the Cape, he narrated, ideas of the Caffres, their domesticities, hopeless animal habits, their ambitions, the latter is to possess guns, and any number of Wives. These now cost £5 sterling each, which limits the supply! Froude is going back, is now in Devonshire with his sick daughter perhaps to take a final leave of her!, I have not seen him since his return to England—else I should have heard of you and other friends in N.Y. that he saw. I had no idea he was going away again.

I read your letter to Carlyle, and had just returned it to my pocket when the Dr came in, (He, I had not seen for some years) so I gave to both your remembrances, and many were the kind things said of you by both, going back through the years when you and Mrs Botta called at this same house, in Cheyne Row; a niece [sic] lives with him, and an Elder, who may be of kin for aught I know, appearing to do the duties of Housekeeper. He walks every day and appears equal to do some miles. I walked with him to Kensington where he went to call on John Forster. I am doing a head of C in Oil, and he comes to me tomorrow for a sitting, his complexion is less clear than it was, but still picturesque characteristic, the colour of a man tells much about him. How few there are, who have so impressed their generation as he, by provoking thought, and acceptance of Actual duties.

6 Wells St. Oxford St. W

25th This was to have gone Saturday last— Now it is Tuesday. I could not get through my work before 6. O’Clock[.] Our mails close at 5½. Carlyle & his Brother came and though he did not stay more than an hour & half, I had to continue the work while it was wet. We have had a very melancholy Event in one of my wives cousins putting an end to his life, a Terrible shock, Bryan Hunt[,] 23, son of Thornton Hunt, shot himself at the London Library, leaving no reason for the act, and betraying no symptom of such an intent before hand. It has since been found, that he must have intended it three weeks before. He could not get employment of any sort, and his mothers means
are small, are all that can be surmized as to a cause[.]. As he not unfrequently came to our house, you may imagine the consternation it has caused, and lament that life to one so young should present a blank outlook. He was always peculiar, in his ways and thoughts clever, hardly affectionate.

Froude has sailed I see by this mornings papers, also I see the Beecher trial is going on. I hope Mrs Butler’s verdict will prove the general one. I hardly know what is thought of it here. We can only wait till enquiry has ceased. If altogether groundless, I cannot conceive a crueller and wickeder charge. I must not stay to make any comments on my then impressions of HWB’s character (rough, but honest, he seemed to me) or I shall again miss a Post, and I want you to know that the £20 you were so good as to send me came safely to hand, and was opportune, and I hope such remainder as is left with not cause you trouble to collect. My daughters in Victoria send better accounts of themselves. The Winter has been very severe there. Summer is with us at last, a few first days too hot. Mrs Laurence and Jessie (the youngest and only one at home) have been ailing the last few days, but getting round again. I keep fairly well[.] We join in loving regards to Each of you, and to those mutual friends in whose memories we live. I am glad Judge Daly & his Wife got home all right. He will have much to say of his holiday. Ireland was not up to his idea.

Yours Ever Truly    Samuel Laurence.

These eight letters—all from Samuel Laurence, none to him—illuminate the overlapping societies of London and New York in the 1860s and 1870s and reveal connections among a surprisingly diverse group of fellow artists, writers, and other figures. We glimpse Edward, Prince of Wales, sitting for his portrait, and Longfellow visiting London and being besieged by fans; we learn of Henry Ward Beecher standing trial for adultery, and we are shocked by the suicide of Bryan Hunt, Thornton Hunt’s son, who shot himself in the London Library. We see Thomas Carlyle calling at the Wells Street studio to seek Laurence’s opinion on the authenticity of a portrait of John
Knox, and we are given the priceless image of the old Sage, in the years after his wife’s death, pulling an iron roller up and down the gravel walk in his backyard garden, greeting an old friend with a familiar and heartfelt “How are you”?

If Laurence was an exceptional letter writer, he was an extraordinary portrait artist capable of distilling the gamut of facial expressions into a single likeness that is remarkably true and flattering. His earliest portrait of George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), for instance, captures the intrinsic, appealing beauty of a countenance most often rendered as overly equine.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Laurence’s list of subjects frequently intersects the roster of the Carlyles’ correspondents. There were many other notables who sat for him as well, for Laurence was much in demand in England and in the United States, in a manner similar to Cecil Beaton, Richard Avedon, or more recently, Annie Leibowitz. In his heyday, photography was very much in its infancy, and portraiture by that medium—for which subjects had to pose in perfect stillness for two minutes or more—was often less than flattering. Laurence himself posed
for amateur photographer Anthony Coningham Sterling in the early 1850s, and he found a way to appear perfectly natural before the unforgiving lens.

Laurence’s letters reveal the social poise, education, and handwriting of a gentleman of privilege, indicating a background of middle-class comfort and status, if not greater wealth. If he were some sort of highly talented autodidact emerging from nowhere, his rise was nothing short of miraculous. There is a parallel or competing history of him that comes from a website, <http://www.stanford.edu/~njenkins/cgi-bin/auden/>, devoted to W. H. Auden and maintained by Nicholas Jenkins of Stanford University. This site, called Family Ghosts, employs meticulous genealogical charts that demonstrate conclusively the distant
relationship of Laurence to Auden via Mary Gertrude Laurence, Samuel Laurence’s daughter, whose second marriage was to Sir George Scott Robertson (1852–1916). Extending that connection, Jenkins gives us numerous details of Laurence’s life not found elsewhere, including his birth to John and Ann Davies Lawrence in Wem, Shropshire, his baptism there in 1813, and his Anglican wedding at All Souls, Marylebone, in 1836. At one point Jenkins asserts that the “ODNB claims that Laurence (or Lawrence) was born in ‘Guildford, Surrey’ and that his ‘parentage and education are unknown’; neither claim seems to be correct.” Jenkins’s Auden site also lists two of the Laurence children, Godfrey Giovanni, born in Italy in 1839, and Mary Gertrude, born eight years later. These Laurence letters in fact reveal evidence of more children: a son born before Godfrey, and daughters Kate, Daisie, and Jessie. It is likely that more facts about Laurence’s earlier years will emerge with the digital development of new census files, container lists, and county records. According to the ODNB, Laurence’s will was administered 19 April 1884, and his estate was valued at £1658 / 0 / 8. The breadth of his life, however, far transcends this rather antiseptic adumbration.

Online investigation of Laurence letters—not omitting the spelling of Lawrence that many correspondents, Americans in particular, seem to favor—turns up specimens at the university libraries of Rochester and Virginia. Even more promising is a Tennyson album curated by the Rosenbach Museum and Library of Philadelphia and documents in the William Cullen Bryant and the Parke Godwin Papers in the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington. At this moment, late in 2008, the autograph dealer David Holmes is offering, for $250, a Laurence letter to “Devoniensis,” associated in his catalog with Dickens (though he died in 1870). This letter, written 8 September 1876, is on mourning stationery and is ironically pertinent to a parallel correspondence with Ruskin that will be explored in a future number of CSA. “Do not imagine I do not like Turner,” Laurence explains to Devoniensis; “I do, only regretting his defective technical knowledge of Oil Colours. It is as vexing to me as a clever Author’s Books would be to you, if full of Bad Spelling!”

Durham, North Carolina
Notes

1. This biographical information is taken from “Samuel Laurence,” by R. E. Graves (DNB) and revised by Ailsa Boyd (ODNB), from the website Family Ghosts, and from Rosemary Ashton 56.

2. See see CL 10: 246n, CL 28: 314n, and David Southern passim.

3. The Library of Congress also has a significant Butler collection for which there is an online container list; see <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/h?aid/faid:@field(DOCID+ms001038>.


5. See Francis Hovey Stoddard 301, 320, 323–28, 331, and passim; see also Prentiss 505.

6. Information on these collections is available through the National Register of Archives (NRA).

7. See CL 29: 218, 224; see also Brent E. Kinser and Southern passim.

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